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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT Monday, April 11, 1938

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "CANNED FOODS AND THEIR LABELS." Information from the Federal Food and Drug Administration, U. S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, D. C.

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This way, please -- to facts for homemakers about canned foods and their labels, and standards of quality for apricots, peaches, pears, cherries, peas, and tomatoes.

First, a little background information, for those who may wonder why we have standards of quality for canned peaches, tomatoes, and so on.

Quoting directly, from today's Washington report:

"Nearly eight years ago," writes our correspondent, "Congress passed the McNary Mapes Amendment to the Food and Drugs Act. The canners themselves asked for this Amendment, to protect the canning industry from the competition of substandard products not labeled to show that they were substandard, and to protect consumers from buying low-grade but wholesome food, without knowing it.

"The McNary Mapes Amendment gives the Secretary of Agriculture power to establish a minimum standard of quality for each kind of canned food except milk and meat products. As soon as the Secretary has established a minimum standard of quality for a certain canned food, that food must measure up to the requirements -- or else carry certain facts on the label so that the housewife will know when she is not getting a standard quality of food.

"So far, the Secretary has established minimum standards for canned peaches, pears, peas, tomatoes, apricots, and cherries. Now . . . . . let's consider tomatoes, since they're one of the most popular of all canned products. Every can of tomatoes that does not measure up to the Government standards must say so. The label must state: 'Below U. S. Standard -- Good Food -- Not High Grade.'

"Now there's another requirement under the McNary-Mapes Amendment. It is that slack-filled canned goods must carry a line reading: 'Slack Fill.' And if the canned goods, canned peas, for example, contain an excessive amount of liquid, that fact also must be printed on the label, in these words: 'Contains Excess Added Liquid.'

"So read all the information on the label, homemakers, when you buy canned apricots, cherries, peaches, pears, tomatoes, and peas. You'll know whether you're buying food that measures up to the Government standards of quality, or food that is below standard, or slack filled, or containing an excessive amount of added liquid. Of course, whatever you buy is wholesome -- otherwise it could not be sold at all, under the Pure Food Law.

"Now, returning to the McNary-Mapes Amendment: Certain deviations from the standards set up for each product are permissible. However, the canner is required to tell what they are, in a special statement made in a specified way. This information in each case is to be printed on a strongly contrasting uniform background in very plain large capital letters of specified size. No diligent label-reader can miss it.

"Take peaches. One of the requirements for standard canned peaches is that the pieces shall be in halves. But peaches cut up some other way are equally good food. If the canner packs quartered peaches, or sliced peaches, or even whole peaches and says so plainly, the buyer will not expect to find Melba halves when she opens the can.

"If the peaches are up to standard in every respect except that they are not uniform in size, the statement, 'Peaches, Ungraded for Size' tells the story. Units in a can are considered uniform sized if the weight of the largest piece in the can is not more than twice the weight of the smallest piece in the can.

"Again, some peaches are packed in water instead of sirup. The statement, 'Water Pack Peaches' is then required on the label. If the can contains white peaches, or freestone peaches, instead of the yellow peaches described in the standard, that fact also goes in a special label statement.

"In a similar way, Kieffer pears must be so labeled, as well as quartered or sliced pears, or water pack pears. 'Peeled apricots' are specially labeled since standard canned apricots are unpeeled.

"For cherries, there are two sets of standards -- one set for sweet cherries, and one for the red sour cherries. The word 'Cherries' only on a can means sweet cherries, usually the yellowish-white varieties. If the cherries are any other type, such as Bing or black, the label must say so.

"Standard canned sweet cherries are unpitted. If the cherries are pitted in the proper way, they are labeled 'Pitted Cherries' just as sliced peaches are designated in a special statement. But if the canner misses a few pits and the cherries have more than 1 pit in 20 ounces, they fall in the substandard class. The label must then read 'Below U. S. Standard -- Good Food -- Not High Grade.' The correct name for the product is 'Partially Pitted Cherries.'

"This brings us to the canned red sour cherries -- the pie cherries. As they are generally pitted before canning, the standard calls for pitted red sour cherries, and any other kind are deviations. The standard is very strict in limiting pits to 1 in 20 ounces of cherries. That's about the amount of fruit in a Number 2 can. If there is more than 1 pit in 20 ounces of cherries the can is substandard and must be so labeled. It must also show the name 'Partially Pitted Red Sour Cherries' in plain and conspicuous type."

And so concludes today's report from the Federal Food and Drug Administration.

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